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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the current and changing roles of the school, family and workplace in the development of young people into adults. Due to changes in these institutions, young people are shielded from responsibility, held in a dependent status, and kept away from productive work-all of which makes their transition into adulthood a difficult and troublesome process. The paper suggests that the young need to be provided with a variety of skills so they can more easily and effectively make the transition to adulthood. The role of the school should be to provide only intellectual skills, while other skills may be more effectively learned through active participation in the occupational institutions of society. (Author)

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HOW DO THE YOUNG BECOME ADULTS?

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INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

The Center for Social Organization of Schools has two primary objectives: to develop a scientific knowledge of how schools affect their students, and to use this knowledge to develop better school practices and organization.

The Center works through five programs to achieve its objectives. The Academic Games program has developed simulation games for use in the classroom. It is evaluating the effects of games on student learning and studying how games can improve interpersonal relations in the schools. The Social Accounts program is examining how a student's education affects his actual occupational attainment, and how education results in different vocational outcomes for blacks and whites. The Talents and Competencies program is studying the effects of educational experience on a wide range of human talents, competencies, and personal dispositions in order to formulate--and research--important educational goals other than traditional academic achievement. The School Organization program is currently concerned with the effects of student participation in social and educational decision-making, the structure of competition and cooperation, formal reward systems, effects of school quality, and the development of information systems for secondary schools. The Careers and Curricula program bases its work upon a theory of career development. It has developed a self-administered vocational guidance device to promote vocational development and to foster satisfying curricular decisions for high school, college, and adult populations.

This report, part of the Social Accounts program, examines the changing roles of the family, the workplace and the school as transitional agents for bringing our youth into adulthood.

Abstract

This paper examines the current and changing roles of the school, family and workplace in the development of young people into adults. Due to changes in these institutions, young people are shielded from responsibility, held in a dependent status, and kept away from productive work - all of which makes their transition into adulthood a difficult and troublesome process.

The paper suggests that the young need to be provided with a variety of skills so they can more easily and effectively make the transition to adulthood. The role of the school should be to provide only intellectual skills, while other skills may be more effectively learned through active participation in the occupational institutions of society.

INTRODUCTION

It is important to ask, along with specific questions about how schools function, more general questions about the development from childhood through youth to adulthood. Only by continuing to ask these more general questions can we avoid waking up some day to find that educational institutions are finely tuned and efficiently designed to cope with the problems of an earlier day. Among the more general questions, we need to ask how it is that the young become adults, and what are the current and changing roles of various formal institutions in that development.

There are three formal institutions that are especially important in examining the changes that are occurring in the way youth are brought to adulthood. One is the school, another is the family, and a third is the workplace. I will reserve the school till last, because changes in the other two institutions proceed from other causes, without regard for their consequences for the young, while schools are explicitly designed with consequences for the young as their primary goal. Thus the family and the workplace - together with certain other aspects of society - form the environment within which the school functions.

Changes in the Family

It is necessary only to give a quick overview of changes in the family's function in bringing children to adulthood, because those changes

have been so great, and need only to be brought to attention. Classically, the family was the chief educational institution for the child, because he carried out most of his activities within it until he left it to form his own. That juncture in life was his transition to adult status - the transition to economic self-sufficiency and family head. The timing of this transition differed widely from place to place and from one economic setting to another. On an Irish farm, it may have been age 35 or even older. In an industrial city, it may have been 16 or even younger. But the transition to full adulthood has characteristically taken place when the former child married and either formed a new household or formed a sub-household within his parental family.

The family has gone through two major transitions that sharply limit its occupational training of the young. The first of these occurred when the father went out to work, into a shop or an office, and thus began to carry out his major productive activities away from home behind the closed doors of an organization. The second occurred when the mother went out to work or otherwise stopped carrying out her major productive activities in the home. Before the first transition, families contained the major productive activities of society. Thus the young learned not only the whole variety of things that one commonly associates with the family, they also learned their principal occupational skills and functions - if not in the

family, then structurally close to it, in an apprentice relation.

For boys, this occupational learning within the family began to vanish as the father went out to work in a shop or an office. For girls, it continued longer, learning household work, cooking, sewing, child care from her mother, whose principal occupation that was. But by now in most families that second transition has taken place as well: the mother's principal occupation is no longer household work, for that work now occupies little of her time and attention. Either she goes out to work like her husband, or occupies herself in other activities which do not require the aid of her daughters. Even child care is minimal, as family sizes have declined. As an economist recently stated, "the home closes down during the day."

Thus the family as a source of occupational learning has declined as it lost its place as the central productive institution of society. But as both adults have come to carry out their central activities outside the home, they have removed other functions from the home and family as well. Friends are drawn from occupation, and adult cocktail parties have replaced neighborhood or extended family gatherings in the social life of the husband and wife. Less and less does the husband's and wife's social life take place in a setting that includes children. Some leisure activities are still carried out as a family, so I don't intend to overstate the case. But the point is that as these large occupational activities of adults

moved out of the home, they took others with them, leaving it a less rich place in opportunities for learning for its younger members.

Changes in the Workplace

Changes in the workplace, subsequent to its removal from the home into specialized economic institutions, have also affected the movement of the young into adulthood. The major changes have been away from small organizations to large ones; away from ad hoc informal hiring practices to formal procedures with formal credentials required of applicants; away from using children in secondary and service activities toward excluding them from workplaces under the guise of "protection;" away from jobs requiring low educational credentials toward jobs requiring more education; away from loosely organized occupational settings in which workers participated with varying schedules and varying amounts of time toward a rigidly-defined "full-time job" with a fixed schedule and fixed time commitment.

All of these trends (apart from some very minor and very recent movements in the other direction in a few of these dimensions) have led the workplace to become less available and less useful to the young until they enter it as full-time workers at the end of a longer and longer period of full-time schooling.[1]

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[1]There are some complications to these trends, and some statistics which appear to go in the opposite direction. For example, the labor force participation rates for persons aged 16-21 enrolled in school increased

These changes in the family and in occupational institutions have led both to become less useful as settings where the young can learn. In the family, the young remain, while the activities from which they could learn have moved out; in workplaces, the activities from which the young could learn remain, but the young themselves have been excluded. This exclusion places youth more on the fringes of society, outside its important institutions. If one is young, it is difficult to get a loan, to buy on credit, to rent an apartment, to have one's signature accepted for any of the many things that are commonplace for adults. The reason is simple: the young have no institutional base, they are a lumpen proletariat outside those institutions of society that are recognized by other institutions and give legitimacy to those persons who are within them.

Before turning to changes in the school, it is important to note one central aspect of the learning that occurred in home and workplaces, and still occurs, though to a sharply reduced extent. It is learning which is variously called "incidental learning" or "experiential learning." It is learning by acting and experiencing the consequences of that action. It is learning through occupying a role with responsibility for actions that

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between 1960 and 1970, from 35 to 40% for men and 25 to 36% for women. But this change reflects an increase in school-going by those who in 1960 would have been only working. The proportion of persons aged 16 to 21 enrolled in school was much higher in 1970 than in 1960. This increase was largely due to a lack of full-time jobs in the labor force for a greatly-expanded age cohort. Thus for many, education became the full-time activity, and labor force participation was restricted to part-time or in-and-out work.

affect others. It is learning that is recognized in colloquial parlance as taking place in "the school of hard knocks." It is not learning that proceeds in the way that learning typically takes place in the classroom, where the first step is cognitive understanding, and the last step - often omitted - is acting on that understanding.

Changes in the School

When the major educational functions were in the home, the school was an auxiliary and supplementary institution with two functions. First, for the small fraction of the population whose occupational destination was clerical or academic, it taught a large portion of the occupational skills: languages, mathematics, philosophy, history. Second, for the large majority, it taught the basic skills of literacy and numeracy: reading, writing, and arithmetic. Then, as the changes in family and workplace took place, the school began to take on two additional functions: first, to provide occupational training for the increasing fraction of occupations that seemed to require technical book learning (occupations ranging from engineering to journalism); and second, to perform some of the educational activities that were not occupational, but had been carried out to differing degrees and often with indifferent success in the family, ranging from music appreciation to civics. In addition to these explicit and positive functions, the school began to carry out an important but largely passive

function as well: to house the young while the parents were off in their specialized adult activities outside the home. This is the function often derogatorily described as the "baby-sitting" function of the school. As women come more and more into the labor force, and desire to participate even more than they do, the demand for such babysitting agencies has increased, extending downward in age to day-care centers for the very young. And as occupational opportunities for the young have lessened, the baby-sitting function has extended upward in age, with the universities, colleges, junior colleges, and community colleges acting as temporary holding stations on the way to adulthood.

This transformation of the schools in response to society has had a consequence that is important in considering the path to becoming adult. This is the massive enlargement of the student role of young persons, to fill the vacuum that the changes in the family and workplace created. The student role of young persons has become enlarged to the point where that role constitutes the major portion of their youth. But the student role is not a role of taking action and experiencing consequences. It is not a role in which one learns by hard knocks. It is a relatively passive role, always in preparation for action, but never acting. In attempting to provide the learning that had earlier taken place through experiential learning in the home and at the workplace, the school kept the same classroom mode of learning that was its hallmark: it not only moved the setting of those

learning activities from outside the school to within; it changed the method from learning through experience as a responsible actor to learning through being taught as a student. There are some exceptions but the general pattern followed that of the classical school, in which a teacher was the medium through which learning was expected to take place. This replaced action as the medium through which learning had taken place in the family or the workplace. The student role, in which a person waits to be taught, became central to the young person's life.

The consequence of the expansion of the student role, and the action-poverty it implies for the young, has been an increased restiveness among the young. They are shielded from responsibility, and they become irresponsible; they are held in a dependent status, and they come to act as dependents; they are kept away from productive work, and they become unproductive. But even if we saw no signs of irresponsibility, stagnant dependency, and lack of productivity, the point would remain the same: the school, when it has tried to teach non-intellective things, does so in the only way it knows how, the way designed to teach intellective capabilities: through a teacher, transmitting cognitive skills and knowledge, in a classroom, to students.

Although the complex problems created by these changes cannot be solved easily, I believe it would be a step toward a solution if we began to conceive of matters a little differently. In particular, the problems become clearer if we wipe away the confusion between "schooling" and

"education." Previously, it was natural that schooling could have been confused with education - for schooling was that part of the education of the young which took place formally, and thus had to be planned for and consciously provided. But the larger part of education took place outside the school. The child spent most of his time outside the school; school was a small portion of his existence. It taught him to read and write and work with numbers, but the most important parts of education it did not provide: learning about work, both the skills and the habits, learning how to function in society, learning how to be a father or mother, husband or wife, learning to take care of others and to take responsibility for others. Because these things were learned informally, through experience, or at least without formal organization, they could be disregarded, and "education" could come to be identified with "schooling."

But much of this other education evaporates as work takes place behind closed doors and as the family is reduced as a locus of important activities. "Schooling" meanwhile, continues to mean much the same thing that it did before, except extended in time: the learning of intellectual skills. Thus although schooling remains a small portion of education, it occupies an increasingly larger portion of a young person's time, while the remaining portion of his education is <u>not</u> well provided by ordinary, everyday, unplanned activities. Consequently, if an appropriate reform of education is to be made, it must begin with this fact: schooling is not all of education,

and the other parts of education require just as much explicit planning and organization as does schooling.

Once this is recognized, then the way is paved for creation of a true educational system - not merely a system of schools, but a system of education that covers non-intellectual learning as well. If one were to go too quickly to a possible solution, or pattern for the future, he would see this as immediately leading toward a multi-track school system in which some young people concentrate on intellectual skills while others concentrate on "practical" or "mechanical" or "vocational" skills. But this pattern fails to recognize clearly the impact of the above separation of schooling and education: it is not only some young people who need the non-intellective portions of education, it is all. Thus it is not the persons who must be divided into different tracks to learn different skills; it is the time of each person that must be so divided. Further, the division is not merely a division between intellectual skills and vocational or practical skills. It is a division among a variety of skills, only some of which are intellectual or vocational. If I were asked to catalog the skills that should be learned in the educational system before age 18, I would certainly include all these:

1. Intellectual skills, the kinds of things that schooling at its best teaches.

2. Skills of some occupation that may be filled by a secondary school graduate, so that every 18-year old would be accredited in some occupation, whether he continued in school or not.
3. Decision-making skills: that is, those skills of making decisions in complex situations where consequences follow from the decisions.
4. General physical and mechanical skills: skills allowing the young person to deal with physical and mechanical problems he will confront outside work, in the home or elsewhere.
5. Bureaucratic and organizational skills: how to cope with a bureaucratic organization, as an employee or a customer or a client, or a manager or an entrepreneur.
6. Skills in the care of dependent persons: skill in caring for children, old persons, and sick persons.
7. Emergency skills: how to act in an emergency, or an unfamiliar situation, in sufficient time to deal with the emergency.
8. Verbal communication skills in argumentation and debate.

This catalog of skills is certainly not all-inclusive, nor are all the skills listed on the same level of generality. They do, however, give a sense of the scope of what I believe must be explicitly included in education.

The next question becomes, "How is this all to be organized?" Or perhaps, "How do we change the schools to do all this?" But the second

question puts the matter wrong. My principal point, and it is the central point of the educational pattern of the future that I envision, is that we do not attempt to have the schools do all this. Schools are prepared to do what they have done all along: teach young people intellectual things, both by giving them information and giving them intellectual tools, such as literacy, mathematics, and foreign languages. Schools are not prepared to teach these other skills - and the history of their attempts to change themselves so that they could do this shows only one thing: that these other activities -- whether they are vocational education, driver training, consumer education, civics, home economics, or something else -- have always played a secondary and subordinate role in schools, always in the shadow of academic performance. The mode of organization of schools, the fact that they are staffed by teachers who themselves have been measured by academic performance, the fact that they lead in a natural progression to more and more intellectually specialized institutions, the universities and then graduate schools - all this means that they are destined to fail as educational institutions in areas other than teaching of intellectual skills.

The pattern for the future, then, as I see it, is one in which the school comes to be reduced in importance and scope and time in the life of a young person from age 12 onward, with the explicit recognition that it is providing only a portion of education. This reduction would necessarily occur, because these other skills must be learned as well - many of them

by experience and practice, some of them including a little admixture of teaching.

It then becomes necessary to ask just where these other skills would be learned. An immediate response, and an incorrect one, I believe, would be to attempt to design specialized institutions to teach these things, as vocational schools were designed to teach occupational skills - incorrect because if my arguments are correct, then these activities are best learned not by being taught but by acting. Thus it is necessary to ask where the action is. The answer is clear: it is in those specialized economic institutions of society into which first men, then women, went out from the family to work. It is in the occupational institutions of society. Women have learned this through the social-psychological poverty of home and neighborhood and have deserted the home for these workplaces.

Thus this education can appropriately take place only in the economic institutions of society - those organizations behind whose doors adults vanish while the child vanishes inside the walls of the school. Such education could not be hit-or-miss, merely placing a young person on the job or in an apprentice situation. It would be necessary to carefully lay out the skills that were necessary to learn, more carefully than I have done in the catalog of eight skills I've listed, and to organize the young person's experiences in such a way that he learns these skills. This would involve, of course, more than one institution outside the school. And it

would require brilliance both in conception and in execution if it is to work well in early days. For it involves nothing less than a breaking open of the economic institutions of society, from factories to hospitals, a removing of the insulation that separates them from the young, and giving them an explicit role in the education of the young. How this would be done will differ from society to society: in the free enterprise capitalist economy of the U.S., it could probably best begin by providing the young with entitlements that could be redeemed by businesses and other enterprises that try to provide the appropriate learning experiences. In other countries, it might better be done in another way. But the end result would be similar - the young would be integrated into the economic activities of society from a very early age, without stopping their schooling, but merely by stopping the dilution of schooling that has occurred in recent years. The economic organizations of society would necessarily change, and change radically, to incorporate the young - not to become schools, but to become institutions in which work is designed not only for productive efficiency, but for learning efficiency as well. The revolution necessary in society is, if I am correct, a revolution within these occupational institutions - from General Motors to government agencies - from business offices to airports.

A reorganization of education in this way would require, if it is to be effective, standards of performance and criteria to be met in the areas other than intellectual, so that the credentials of a young person would be

far broader than those implied by the various diplomas and degrees that have been carried over in modified form from an early period. Some of the credentials would be based on performance tests such as those used in industries and skilled crafts today. Others would be based on performance ratings by supervisors and on letters of recommendation. For developing other criteria, inventiveness and imagination would be necessary. But the essential point is that those skills must be just as explicitly evaluated and form just as much a portion of a young person's credentials as intellectual skills do today.

There are a number of important implications to this reorganization of the path toward adulthood. If we recognize that it requires an explicit breaking open of work organizations to incorporate the young, the most direct implication is an enormous transformation of these economic institutions. Their product would be not only goods and services to be marketed, but also learning, the latter paid from public funds as schools are today. They would become much more diversified institutions, no longer preserving the fiction that nothing but production occurs within them, but recognizing that much of adults' social lives, and most of their time expenditures, takes place within them, and expanding that recognition into explicit design of this experience.

A less direct implication of this reorganization of education is that it would reduce the relationship between educational performance and family educational background or social class. In schools, the pervasive power

of testing on intellectual criteria - the only real criteria the school knows - exacerbates and emphasizes the inequalities of academic background that children bring with them to school. If education is appropriately defined to include these other equally important skills, then the artificially-heightened disparity between students from "advantaged" and "disadvantaged" backgrounds will be reduced - but only, of course, if these other activities are carried out in their natural habitat, rather than in the school, which constitutes an uncongenial setting for them.

Finally, a still less direct implication of this reorganization of education is related to the current controversy about school integration through balancing of the races or social classes in school. That controversy, which reflects a real problem where residential segregation is pronounced - as it is in all large urban areas - cannot be solved as long as education is identified with a school building containing classrooms and teachers. It can be solved if formal education takes place largely outside the schools and in economic institutions - for it is the economic institutions that of all those in society are the least segregated by race and in which racial integration produces least friction - because it occurs in a setting with work to be done in an organized, rather than anarchic, structure of interpersonal relations.

This effect of such a reorganized system of education in integrating the society racially is not an accidental one. It arises because this reorganization is not an ad hoc, makeshift patching up of outworn institutions.

It is a reorganization that recognizes fundamental structural changes in society - the drying up of family functions and the specialization of economic activities - and asks where in such an emerging social structure is the appropriate locus for the young, if they are to have the opportunity for moving to adulthood. The answer is that the young belong where everyone else is, and where the action is: inside the economic institutions where the productive activities of society take place.